
THREE FREEDOMS UNDER THE MAGNIFYING GLASS



Civic
Initiatives

freedom of expression

freedom of assembly

freedom of association

Three Freedoms Under the Magnifying Glass Violations of Basic Human Rights in Serbia

May 3 - May 16, 2024

Freedom of Expression

The SNS announcement targets journalists and activists

The official announcement of SNS from Novi Sad, in a tabloid manner, targets journalist Dinko Gruhonjić and activists Brajan Brković and Miran Pogačar. The text published on the official website of the Serbian Progressive Party is full of chauvinistic insults and the previously seen labeling of critics of the regime as "Serb-haters". The announcement comes in the light of the pre-election campaign for the upcoming local elections and is a clear indication of where the targeting campaigns that are then spread in the pro-government media come from. The campaign against Dinko Gruhonjić, in which the president and other SNS officials participated, led to a serious threat to the safety of this journalist and his family.

A man was filming the N1 team

An unknown man, who is assumed to be a foreign citizen, approached the reporter and the N1 cameraman and started filming them. The man was filming the N1 crew and asking them questions about who they were and from which television station. The N1 team was at a location in New Belgrade where a large number of buses with Chinese citizens were parked. They were brought to follow the Chinese president's visit to Serbia, as was the case with a large number of Serbian citizens, who came from public companies from different cities in an organized manner. Why the man interrogated the journalist team on a work assignment and why and for what purpose he photographed the journalist and the cameraman remain unclear. Obstructing journalists in their work is a form of stifling the free media and impartial and objective reporting and informing the public.

A potential example of censorship on Radio Belgrade

The "Question of the Morning" section of the "Catch the Day" show, in which citizens participate in the program to talk about city problems, was suddenly canceled. This happened, by accident or not, after the listener criticized the President of the country, Aleksandar Vučić. RTS denied that the cancellation of the section had anything to do with that. In a press release, RTS justifies the cancellation by the need for new ways of communicating with listeners, and in accordance with modern trends, however it is still indicative that the decisions on new conceptual solutions for the show were made after public criticism.

The difficult situation of media freedom in Serbia

According to Reporters Without Borders, Serbia fell 7 places compared to 2022 regarding the Media Freedom Index. In the report for the year 2023, Serbia took the 98th place, which places it in the fourth zone - the zone of a difficult situation. In Serbia, the ruling party and pro-regime media have intensified attacks on independent journalism, the report states, and Russian influence is also highlighted. Every day we witness the way government representatives treat independent journalists. Aggressive communication to which they are exposed leads to the normalization of violence and consequent threats in the digital sphere, but also physical attacks in reality. The situation in which journalists are is also demonstrated by the decision of the program director of the N1 television, which he had to make, that the journalists of this company no longer go to the conferences of Aleksandar Šapić due to the regular humiliation and attacks to which the journalists are exposed at these conferences.

Fredoom of Assembly

Tensions in the hall of the Assembly of the city of Zaječar

The citizens of Zaječar entered the hall of the City Assembly and after pushing with security managed to enter the session where the construction of the quarry was discussed. Citizens are against the construction of the quarry and have been pointing out possible harmful consequences for the environment for a long time. However, their voices are rarely heard and they are completely excluded from the decision-making process that will affect their lives. The lack of political will of the ruling structures to include citizens in the decision-making process and creation of public policies leads to a situation where citizens and activists are forced to take more radical steps in order to make their voices heard. Thus, there was a clash between activists and security guards, and the police did not react or protect the peaceful nature of the gathering. In the end, the construction of the quarry, which the locals oppose, was voted on.

Fredoom of Association

Arresting of representatives of the association before Xi Jinping's visit

Before Chinese President Xi Jinping's visit to Serbia, three members of the Serbian-Chinese Friendship Society were detained for 48 hours by the police. In addition to the members of the association, two of whom are women in their 70s, the brother of one of the association's members was also arrested. The daughter of the arrested Dejan Marković explains that they were arrested for no reason. This association propagates the religious teaching of Falun Gong or Falun Dafa, which opposes feminism, LGBT identities, but also the Chinese Communist Party, which is why supporters of this teaching are persecuted in China. Representatives of this association from Serbia were also arrested in 2014, also on the eve of the visit of the Chinese delegation, because the association was planning a protest rally. Although the activities of this organization are not prohibited in our country, the authorities obeyed the laws of another country in persecuting politically unfit actors, which is increasingly happening in cases of persecution of Russian citizens with anti-war sentiment living in Serbia. With this, Serbia tramples on its freedoms and rights guaranteed by the Constitution and the law.

Šapić aggressive towards citizens

A group of citizens and activists of the association "Za naš kej" gathered at the media conference of Aleksandar Šapić, where he spoke again about the improvement of the Sava quay. They wanted to ask the current mayor questions and to express their dissatisfaction with his work at the head of the capital, as well as to point out the numerous affairs that happened in the capital during his mandate. The event was marked by the mayor's misconduct, which culminated when he took a citizen's phone and threw it on the ground. Aleksandar Šapić's violent behavior and vocabulary have gone by for a long time without any reaction from the leadership of the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS), in front of which he became a mayor, which is not surprising because this party and its members regularly communicate in this way with political opponents. This time the verbal violence spilled over into physical violence and the question is how far is this government ready to go in suppressing every form of criticism? Those who are in public positions are obliged to endure a greater degree of criticism, as well as to answer the questions of journalists, however, with the transition from one election cycle to another, the patience of power holders and tolerance for criticism is decreasing.

The former union president is still in custody

Former President of the Military Union of Serbia, Novica Antić, has had his detention extended, with no indication of when the trial could begin. We remind you that Antić was arrested at the end of February on suspicion of having committed the criminal offense of embezzlement. Then, in March, he was dismissed from the post of head of the military union. From the beginning, it was suspected that the motives behind the arrest of Antić were political, due to the public representation of the interests of members of the Serbian army and criticism of the competent ministry. Various disciplinary procedures were conducted against him even before this, which, it is suspected, have always been politically motivated with the desire of the authorities to bring the leadership of the trade union under their control.